

Become A Special Educator in Tennessee

Feature Story

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After working in the corporate world for 10 years as a computer sales manager, I began looking for a career change. I became a substitute teacher in the spring of 2004. This piqued my interest in becoming a full-time teacher. The BASE-TN (Become A Special Educator in TN) Initiative, a tuition-support program sponsored by the Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education, provided an opportunity for me to become a special education teacher, and Fisk University's Special Education Program gave me a path to reach that goal. The BASE-TN Program provides financial assistance to eligible professional personnel who desire to earn a Tennessee teacher license in special education. This support involves a commitment to teach in a Tennessee public school two years for each academic year of financial support received, serving students with disabilities.

As an Asian immigrant, I received my elementary education in Taiwan. I traveled with my parents to North Africa and attended the middle school there. They wanted to provide the best education possible for me. Thus, I was sent to Christian Academy in Houghton, New York, and I completed high school in Denton, Texas. Although I did not understand the English language very well during my high school years, the teachers were all very patient, and they held high academic expectations for me.

I embraced cultural diversity during my middle and high school years. I realized that people from different cultures look differently, but deep inside, all persons have the same aspirations: love, respect and peace.

There were two key aspects of my professional development at Fisk University: (1) the instructional strategies, and (2) the classroom observations. Fisk University professors taught me how to develop, implement, and evaluate an effective curriculum in the regular and special classroom settings. I was also taught how to effectively manage inappropriate behaviors using various techniques.

During classroom observations, I discovered that many children have learning disabilities that generally delay their academic progress. This further delays their development in social skills and language communications. Their emotions erupt from time to time, and these eruptions are often misunderstood. Underneath this erratic behavior are wonderful personalities and academic potential waiting to be discovered and developed. I wanted to become a special education teacher to provide these students with individualized instruction and to help them in developing skills to become productive citizens.

I received my Tennessee Special Education teacher license in May 2006, and I look forward to teaching students who have special needs who are enrolled in a large urban system. The BASE-TN Teaching Program provided significant financial support, enabling me to reach this goal.

For more information about the BASE-TN Initiative, visit www.k12.tn.us/BASE-TN or call 1-888-212-3162.



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